

My family

In the life of my family

Philomena Hiri, June, 14th 2024

What is family?

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the term 'family' refers to a group consisting of one or more parents and their children living together as a unit. It can also mean all the descendants of a common ancestor. The New York Times features a column in the lifestyle section that explores the concept of family through various life experiences. The definition of family evolves as life progresses, but as for me, it is fundamentally about love and support. One might wonder if the absence of love and support signifies the end of family. While there are many nuances to this topic, the essence of family remains constant through change and evolution. Walt Disney Pictures. (2002). Lilo & Stitch [Film]. Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment encapsulates this with the Hawaiian term "Ohana," which means family, and emphasizes that "Family means nobody gets left behind or forgotten."

Meet my family

Based on my understanding of family, you can anticipate what to expect from mine. In my pre-teen years, Sunday nights were special. After dinner and the seven o'clock news, which my father watched to stay informed on current affairs and politics, our local television channel would broadcast a show at thirty minutes past seven, pm. This show, which we watched together as a family, depicted real-life issues that we all enjoyed. Occasionally, my parents would delve into their own conversations, with my mother sharing stories that related to the drama on screen. They used these moments to offer us advice and set clear rules. Parenting shortcuts, right? They admired that the show featured a Christian family led by a father who was a minister. We were entertained, especially since we were also a family of five siblings, just like in the show. The characters' ages and dynamics closely mirrored our own, although the character corresponding to me was of a different gender. We would often debate and form opinions about the characters, which I found challenging at times to align with the character I was supposed to represent.

Among our favorite family activities are games that everyone can enjoy, such as Scrabble, Monopoly, and trivia. For this article, I wanted to introduce you to my family, my seventh heaven! We took a fruit personality quiz to illustrate the unique characters in my family. Although there is no scientific link between fruits and personality traits, we embraced the fun of the exercise. My father was represented by a pear, symbolizing his zest and quick wit, with a love for mental challenges and debates. My mother was likened to a mango, indicative of her strong convictions and cannot be easily swayed; the quiz, however, failed to reflect her profound empathy and generosity. The eldest sibling, my only brother, was matched with a banana,

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capturing his tender heart, kindness, warmth, and empathy, yet he often triumphs in challenging situations. This portrayal met no resistance from us; in fact, the quiz undersold his generosity and good intentions. Who says kindness and gentleness have no place in the world of a victor? Now, let us delve into the sisters' realm. The oldest sister was initially pegged as a coconut, characterized as thoughtful, cautious, astute, sociable, witty, and occasionally stubborn. Knowing the typical traits of eldest daughters, we retook the quiz for her, and she came out as an orange, described as "admired for your willpower. You are shy, dependable, a hard worker with an artistic flair. You are methodical, and always results-driven." We all nodded in agreement, recognizing how accurately it depicted her, and she could not help but smile. The middle child, the very center of our sibling quintet, is associated with the pineapple: fearless, taking much of what life throws at them in stride, quick to make decisions, and even quicker to act on them. They display amicable leadership skills and are natural organizers. They possess a gift for making friends rapidly, being sincere and loyal to the core. Moreover, they are courageous in making life changes, unfazed by the magnitude of any task at hand, especially in urgent or critical situations. We will not delve into the quiz's biases, as middle children like myself are known to be very diplomatic. As the fourth child and third daughter, the peach granted me numerous accolades, some arguably exaggerated but I will graciously accept, as compromise is our forte. Envision me as blunt and candid, amiable, driven, albeit slow, reflective, forgiving, and vocal, savoring life to the fullest, courtesy of the peach in the quiz. As for the youngest, the cherry was not at the top in this instance but with our lastborn. The cherry depicted someone warm, courteous, and full of life, with a keen appreciation for aesthetics and a love for nature and beauty in all forms. She embodies all this, along with the perks of being the youngest, crowned with sublime beauty. Considering these traits, who would you guess forms the strongest friendships, alliances, or tends to clash often?

Family lately

The idyllic seventh heaven has been delightfully transformed with new members. I now have three nephews and one niece. The additions from pineapple and cherry have brought rays of sunshine into our lives, mesmerizing in Generation Alpha's adaptability and resilience, technological savviness, brief attention spans, and keen inquisitiveness, as well as welcoming two more brothers-in-law into our family. It seems divine providence favored gender balance for us. Recently, family time has been filled with celebrations of milestones, birthdays, unwavering support, conversations about life, and casual lunch gatherings. My parents' home in the countryside is our favorite rendezvous point, rich with cherished memories. We all reside quite a distance away, roughly an hour's drive. In the countryside, the children have the freedom to play and run outside, cycle in a safe area, explore the garden, and encounter farm animals—pleasures that urban apartment living cannot offer. We purposefully plan to meet once a month, although occasionally other family commitments take precedence.

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My immediate family is just one part of a much larger extended family, which includes ninety-seven cousins on my father's side alone. My father was one of nineteen siblings. While it is impossible to gather everyone at once, various events throughout the year allow us to see about 70% of the family annually. We have established a cousins' association dedicated to supporting each other's welfare, guided by a constitution—a practice inherited from our parents. Additionally, we ensure that we meet quarterly.

"The sun looks down on nothing half as good as a household laughing together over a meal," Lewis, C. S. (1949). *The Weight of Glory*. Undoubtedly, spending quality time is of immense importance. Sharing food and drinks, coupled with hearty laughter, are the moments that sustain us through challenging times. This principle, 'family first, always,' was ingrained in us by our parents.

"Family not only needs to consist of merely those whom we share blood, but also for those whom we would give blood." Dickens, C. (1995). Mugby Junction, *Wordsworth Editions*. Family transcends mere genetic ties. Our house manager of eighteen years has become an integral part of our family. Her family, living about 100 kilometers from my parents, is involved in every family event and holiday. She stands as a central figure in our family. My mother, an only child, found a sister in her. Additionally, my sisters and I share a godmother who is regarded as family, and my mother has gained another soul sister. The orchestration of life is indeed extraordinary.

How family shapes us personally

Studies suggest that a significant portion of our belief system is formed before the age of seven. At this stage, nearly everyone is part of a family unit, in whatever form it may take. We are not isolated; we lack the autonomy to make our own choices. Our beliefs are shaped by our experiences, and by what we observe and hear. These beliefs go on to shape our perspectives on life, which in turn manifests in our behavior, often leading to outcomes that reinforce those original beliefs.

The cyclical relationship between beliefs, perspectives, and behaviors significantly influences our self-image, self-esteem, and sense of self-worth, which then translates to our identity, personality, capabilities, career choices and relationships.

My family has been the cornerstone of my religious and spiritual life, significantly influencing my decisions, conflict resolution, and approach to various aspects of life. They've also molded my career path, relationships, and character traits. However, as an adult, I recognize that not all family-influenced traits are beneficial. Therefore, understanding the reasons behind certain life aspects is crucial. Therapy serves not only as a means for mental support but also as a tool for self-discovery, connecting our behavioral patterns to the experiences that formed us. This process has led to a firmer grasp of my strengths, acceptance of my personality and how to get the most out of it, and a focus on improving my weaknesses and challenging limiting beliefs.

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Family dynamics significantly influence our capacity to achieve goals. In an exercise to identify the starting point for goal attainment, one steps forward for each family-derived privilege and steps back for each disadvantage. This alters the starting line for reaching one's goals. However, disadvantages from family circumstances do not preclude reaching the finish line, nor do family privileges negate the need for effort in goal pursuit. Furthermore, accomplishments are not devalued because of privileged experience; rather, they set the stage for greater expectations.

Conclusion

Dolly Parton, in her song "Family," captures the intricate dynamics of family relationships and emphasizes the importance of unconditional love and understanding for our loved ones, despite their flaws. She highlights trust and resilience, the diversity within families, and the significance of forgiveness and self-reflection. I believe this encapsulates the true essence of family.

Recognizing that various issues may lead families to become dysfunctional, disrupting peace and trust, and deeply wounding individuals, some may argue that the concept of family is overrated. However, family is fundamental, and its definition can be personalized. Family is where we find profound meaning, serving as our support system, personal cheerleaders, educators, counselors, and more, as needed.

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Reference List

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